

Soc 4062 Out of Control

Liddy's Evil World

Reviewed by
Joel Swerdlow

The reviewer is the author of "Code Z."

Self-proclaimed Watergate mastermind G. Gordon Liddy once requested that he be shot to guarantee his silence. Refusal to testify earned him contempt of court and contempt of Congress citations. Of all the Watergate figures, he alone offered no explanations, granted no soul-searching interviews, and wrote no book.

Until now...

Like E. Howard Hunt, John Ehrlichman and Spiro Agnew, Liddy has turned to fiction.

"I'll be writing," Liddy told reporters upon his release in September 1977, after 52½ months in prison. "But it will definitely not be a roman a clef."

All right. The novel can be judged on its own terms. It is about an intelligence operative turned inter-

At times, Liddy appears to pursue the existentialist notion that reading about an activity should take as long as it does in real life: "Towelng off, Rand shaved, administered eyedrops and dressed in his most conservative suit: a navy three-piece custom Brooks sack. He wore a white shirt, and a sterling bar held up the knot of a silver gray tie." And so on.

Nearly as banal is the world according to G. Gordon Liddy, a place of junior-high gropings—"God! Is that all you can think of?" "I dunno. Try me."; misguided masculinity—"a man doesn't let another do his fighting for him"; and physiology textbook violence—"His fingers kept right on going through the wet pulp of the man's eyeballs and the shell-thin bone of the rear of the socket to penetrate right into the warm, moist unresistant softness of the brain itself." The victims always seem to be defenseless.

Although Liddy is not necessarily a worse writer than others whose thrillers have done well, he fails to follow the basic rules of narrative consistency. When convenient, for example, he reveals a character's inner thoughts, while at other times he conceals the same character's motivation in an attempt to create tension.

Not all novels are autobiographical, but Liddy makes little effort to hide. The climactic scene is an airplane dogfight over his native Dutchess County, New York. The hero, flying a Messerschmitt "bearing full wartime Luftwaffe markings," sings German marching songs, listens to the "triumphal strains of Wagner," and receives telepathic commands in German ("Gegenuber! Rollen Sie rechts ein!") as he shoots down the CIA bad guys.

Liddy himself is a pilot, speaks German, has commented admiringly on German discipline. Jack Anderson once reported that Liddy invited friends over to the National Archives to view Nazi propaganda films. One scene showed Hitler's plane breaking through the clouds. "Liddy was very much turned on," a witness told Anderson. "Out of Control" ends with the hero's own airborne triumph.

With clues so obvious, one wonders what political revelations "Out of Control" might harbor. Here, Liddy remains true to his vow of silence. There aren't any. His most startling assertion is that "a very few top entry people in Hoover's heyday" planned suicide when scandals were about to break, "a sort of die for the emperor thing," that "guaranteed their family would be taken care of." Journalists who have investigated Hoover's regime say no such suicide contingencies existed.

Liddy always claimed to be just following orders, to be completely apolitical. But he did enjoy access to top government officials and his behavior did typify—although to an extreme—widely shared perceptions and beliefs. With this in mind, the opinions emerging from his novel become interesting:

- The United States conducted post-Watergate "show trials" of intelligence officials.

- Crimes committed on behalf of the government are not crimes because there's no profit motive.

- Government officials would let the Russians prevail rather than reveal their own incompetence.

- Reformers within the CIA do not hesitate to issue kill orders against personal adversaries.

- Professionals do not kill for spite or revenge. Amateurs, like presidents of the United States, do.

- A drive through New York City's ultra-liberal West Side requires a panzer, not a car.

"Out of Control" is noteworthy only because the one Watergate convict who claimed to live by a pristine code of honor is now trying to cash in. As a condition for parole, Liddy had to sign a pauper's oath postponing payment of the \$40,000 fine imposed by Judge Sirica. Cost records show that much of it is still due. Liddy, like the rest of us, has to pay his bills.

Book World

OUT OF CONTROL

By G. Gordon Liddy

(St. Martin's, 303 pp. \$10.95)

national financier who joins with the Mafia to take over a multinational corporation, outmaneuver the Russians, and just in the nick of time save the American people from—you guessed it—their own government.

Liddy is about as good a novelist as he is a burglar. "Out of Control" gets caught because it commits the one unforgivable sin for thrillers: it is boring. The descriptions are irrelevant, the dialogue too unrealistic, and the plot too contrived. Worst of all, the hero is so nasty, so amoral, and so eager to choose jogging over sex, that the reader just doesn't care what happens to him. A book populated only by bad guys simply can't be appealing.